

NARRATOR: Williams, Woody
INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves
DATE: March 23, 2001
LOCATION: Boise, Idaho
PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter	Summary
000	Introduction.
010	Williams described his early life. He talked about his father's career with the United States Forest Service, where he mainly worked in Washington and Oregon. Williams' career in fire began before he graduated from high school.
040	Williams said his father did talk about fires that he fought during his career in the forest service. Williams, however, did not recall specific fires that his father fought.
050	Williams talked about his first job fighting fire, which was with a state-run agency. He continued to talk about how his early years shaped his career in the forest service. He claimed that he did not know what he wanted to do until the summer of 1959 when he worked with the forest service.
070	He said that three things in 1959 led to him pursuing a career. He said it was the fires that year, the people he worked with, and the feeling being in the outdoors. He continued to describe why he enjoyed fighting fires.
095	Williams recalled the first fire he fought, which was during the construction of the interstate between LaGrande and Pendleton, Oregon. He said that when he has driven on that stretch of interstate he always has thought about that fire.
110	His first appointment with the Forest Service was a summer job, and he spoke of the aspects of that job, including brush and trail crew and fire fighting. He continued to talk about the importance of brush and trail crew in the forest, particularly in the late 1950s. He did mention that brush and trail crew needed to fight fire.
140	Williams described how he gained his knowledge about fighting fire. He said that aptitude, experience, and fire school helped him to learn and excel at fighting fire. He continued to talk about fire training school, which was called fire school and guard school and occurred in the early summer on forests throughout the West. He also said that training has increased during his time with the forest service.

- 195 Williams mentioned that brush and trail crew work was not just busy work. He said this work helped with timber sales and with fire suppression. The amount (or miles) of trail and roads, according to Williams, depended on what ranger district or forest a person traveled on.
- 235 Williams felt that his early life was focused on the outdoors, which probably helped with his choice of a profession.
- 250 In terms of physical training, Williams said that hard work in the early years was the way to become physically fit. He said the idea of physical training came later in his forest service career. He continued to talk about going to college during his early years. He eventually quit college and got on at the forest service full time.
- 290 1960, according to Williams, was a big fire year on the Willowa-Whitman. He talked in detail about the Anthony Lakes fire. Williams was fighting another fire near Anthony Lakes when the Anthony Lakes fire started. Williams moved to the Anthony Lakes fire and worked on that fire in various aspects in the summer, fall, and spring. In terms of crews fighting the fire, Williams said that local people as well as volunteers from Portland battled that blaze. Williams offered his opinions about the different types of people who fought the fire at Anthony Lakes.
- 405 Williams continued to talk about people, such as loggers, ranchers, etc., who helped the forest service fight fires. Williams said that the forest service moved away from these types of people. Williams continued to talk about a recent forest fire training session he conducted with loggers from Montana. He explained why he went to Montana to train these loggers.
- 470 In June 1963 Williams transferred from the Willowa-Whitman forest to the Malheur forest, both of which are in Oregon. He explained the differences between these two forests.
- 500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO
- 000 Williams continued to talk about the Malheur National Forest, concluding that the experience on that forest benefited him greatly.
- 020 Williams worked on the Malheur forest as an assistant fire control officer. He explained what both the assistant and the fire control officer did. According to Williams the assistant job allowed to get his hands on various aspects of fire control.

- 050 During his early years with the forest service, lookouts still dotted the landscape in the national forests. Williams explained the importance of lookouts and the reasons why lookouts became less importance in fire control. Williams offered numerous reasons why the forest service moved away from lookouts, but he did mention the certain parts of the Malheur National Forest still contained several lookouts.
- 105 Williams discussed how aerial support for fire control was during his first years with the forest service. He said a lot of fire control has not changed since he began with the forest service in 1959. He talked about the aerial operations on the district he worked at in 1959; he said that aerial suppression has become more sophisticated over time.
- 140 Williams talked about hotshot crews as a tool to fight forest fires. He mentioned the beginnings of this type of crew and their importance to fire control. With prompting by the interviewer, Williams felt that the teamwork within hotshot crew really aided their forest fire fighting.
- 175 During his three years (1963-1966) as the assistant fire control officer, he said that no big fires occurred on the district. He talked about why he moved to a different job in 1966; he got a better job (fire control officer) with more pay. He explained the differences between these two jobs. (They were on different districts in the same national forest.)
- 210 Williams said that they were no big fires during his time as the fire control officer on the Bear Valley ranger district on the Malheur National Forest (1966-1971), but he said that there were numerous small fires that kept them busy. He explained some aspects of his jobs that he enjoyed during these five years as a fire control officer.
- 225 With prompting from the interviewer, Williams explained in detail the duties of a fire control officer during a "typical" day during fire season. He also talked about the importance of "smoke chasing," meaning finding fires and controlling them before they became big (or project) fires.
- 330 During the early years, Williams worked long hours. He said that a ranger told him that if he worked 40 hours a week he would not be fired, but he would not be advanced. He talked about various payment plans when he worked over forty hours a week. He continued to talk about his leadership skills and about the reasons why he advanced up the ladder in the forest service. He talked about why he gained promotion while others did not.
- 415 During his eight years (1963-1971) on the Malheur forest, he tried to learn about the weather. He said he leaned on meteorologists in the area to help them. He talked about the vast amount of weather data that he

accumulated during those years, including information before he worked on that forest.

455 With prompting from the interviewer, Williams discussed how he communicated with his personnel during his five years as the fire control officer. He also offered his opinions regarding the importance of communication in controlling or fighting fire.

500 **END OF SIDE TWO**
TAPE TWO SIDE TWO

000 [Note: Tape two is recorded on side B only, and there is no introduction.] Williams continued his discussion about communication during fire season. He particularly compared the communication in the 1950s and 1960s to the 1990s.

020 During his time on Malheur National Forest, Williams and his fire crew traveled to the fire in various ways. He talked about these various ways, and he described how helicopters and airplanes helped with fire suppression.

035 Williams mentioned the various locations in Oregon where smokejumper bases were. During his time on the Malheur, they mainly got the smokejumpers from LaGrande, but there were also smokejumper bases in Cave Junction and Redmond, Oregon.

055 With prompting from the interviewer, Williams talked about the beginnings of total mobility with fire suppression resources, including hotshot crews and aerial support. He also mentioned the rise of the Boise (now National) Interagency Fire Center as a factor in using national or regional resources to fight large fires.

075 Williams offered his opinions on the initial attack policy (or 10 a.m. Policy) during his first years with the forest service. He felt that resources were better spent by attacking fires while they are small, which was the basis for the 10 a.m. Policy. He also talked about how some fires never could fall within the realm of that policy.

115 Williams talked about current policies and offered his opinions on these policies. He thought the forest service should still attempt to suppress most small fires instead of managing them.

145 A fire control officer, according to Williams, toiled at various tasks during the non-fire season with most of those tasks relating to either the past or the next fire season. He talked about his memories of the non-fire season for a fire control officer. He also mentioned the changes in the non-fire

season aspects of the job over time, particularly the increase in paperwork. He felt the paperwork changes in his job made it more specialized and sophisticated, but it also was “overkill” on certain aspects of the job. He closed by saying that these changes in his job did not occur while he worked on the Malheur National Forest.

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END OF SIDE ONE
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Anthony Lakes fire (1960, Oregon)
Baker, Oregon
Boise Interagency Fire Center (National Interagency Fire Center)
Enterprise, Oregon
John Day, Oregon
LaGrande, Oregon
Malheur National Forest (Oregon)
United States Forest Service
Willowa-Whitman National Forest (Oregon)

NARRATOR: Williams, Woody
INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves
DATE: April 5, 2001
LOCATION: Boise, Idaho
PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter

Summary

000	Introduction.
010	In 1971, Williams became the zone fire manager for three districts on the Malheur National Forest. He explained this job's protocols.
030	During his years on the Malheur as a zone fire manager (1971-1974), he and his crews battled only small fires (40 acres or less). He offered his opinions as to why most fire during this time were small.
050	With prompting from the interviewer, Williams talked, in detail about proscribed burning during his years on the Malheur National Forest. Williams also furnished his thoughts about proscribed fires on a national forest. He felt the trick in proscribed fire was the ability to burn enough acreage to achieve the maximum benefit. He also talked about the rhetoric involved in today's debate about proscribed burning and the problems in today's attempts in proscribed fire. Williams mentioned the need in certain forests to burn during both the spring and the fall.
120	Williams, during his time as a fire management officer, oversaw the fuels management program. He talked about exactly what the program entail.
135	Timber sales is a large part of the national forest. Williams talked about timber sales as a part of his various jobs with the United States Forest Service, and he offered his opinions about the positives and negatives in timber sales, particularly as it pertains to forest fires. Williams also talked about the term allowable cut, and how it affected his work on the Malheur and Willamette National Forests.
205	Some of Williams' proscribed fires did escape. He talked about why proscribed fires can escape and why it is important to follow proper procedures during a proscribed burn.
245	During Williams' term as a zone fire manager, he led overhead crews in the three districts. He described the various groups, both national forest and outside the national forest, who came together to fight forest fires.
270	After working on the Malheur National Forest, Williams moved into a forest fire management officer position on the Rogue River National

Forest. He then talked about some policies changes (although Williams said the changes were mostly rhetorical) and name changes inside the forest fire policy during the 1970s. He continued to talk about the initial attack of forest fire and the movement towards fighting fire with a cost-benefit analysis mindset.

- 360 Williams described his brief (fifteen months) service on the Rogue River National Forest. He talked about the lack of project fires and the uniqueness of that forest.
- 380 When Williams moved from Rogue River National Forest to the Willamette National Forest, he went from one of the smallest forest to the largest forest on region six of the forest service. He talked about the differences between those two places.
- 405 After clear cutting a section of forest, forest service employees followed certain procedures. Williams talked about the procedures he used when he worked as a forest fire management officer on the Willamette National Forest.
- 475 With prompting from the interviewer, Williams talked about the difficulty in planting trees on a national forest. He said that trees were usually planted during the worst weather in the fall or spring.
- 500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO
- 000 Williams discussed how with the rise up the job ladder in the Forest Service he spent less time on the ground and more time in the office. He did mention, however, his work on the ground, as well as some aspects of his work in the office.
- 015 During the 1970s and through the 1980s, according to Williams, the goals and policies of the forest service stayed well defined. He offered his opinions about policy during those two decades and the change he saw during the 1990s.
- 030 During his time on Willamette National Forest, Williams did see several large project fires as well escape fires from proscribed burning. He talked about the Shady Beach fire on the forest during 1988. The fire burned 9,000 acres, which, according to Williams, was a large fire for Western Oregon. He did mention that most large fires in the 1980s on the Willamette were human caused.
- 060 Williams offered his version of a “typical” day for a forest fire management officer during his decade-plus (1975-1989) on the Willamette

National Forest. He said he try to look for opportunities in planning and oversight where he “could make a difference.” He told about a couple of occasions where his planning and oversight helped to avoid difficult fire situations or large project fires.

- 120 With prompting from the interviewer, Williams discussed weather and its importance for forest fires. He talked about the differences in weather from eastern Oregon to western Oregon. When he came to a new area, he looked for “an old timer” that could educate him about the weather within the forest. His fourteen years on the Willamette offered him an opportunity to become accustom to the weather in that region of Oregon.
- 170 In 1980 Williams became an incident commander on a national incident management team. He explained what both of those terms meant and how he became involve in this aspect of forest fire management. These teams oversaw the crews fighting large fires, and members of these teams were known for their expertise in forest fire management.
- 230 While serving in this aspect (incident commander), Williams traveled to other western states to battle large blazes. He said that he had traveled to other regions before he obtained this credential.
- 260 Williams talked about the rise of the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise. He talked about how the Center grew in the late 1960s and 1970s, but the 1980s served as the decade when it came into its own.
- 280 In 1989 Williams moved from the Willamette to NIFC. He explained why he decided to take this job (national incident mobilization officer). He offered his opinions on the positives and negatives of the job, as well as the aspects of the job.
- 335 During this job at NIFC, Williams said he worked with national issues. He furnished his thoughts about what national issues he dealt with. He continued to talk about how this job really felt like he worked with fire on a year-round basis. He said that at NIFC they also assisted governmental agencies with national emergencies, such as earthquakes and floods.
- 420 During non-emergency periods, Williams traveled throughout the United States. During emergency or heavy fire seasons, he stayed in Boise and worked from NIFC.
- 440 Williams offered his thoughts about a “typical” day during the fire season, specifically during the busy 1994 fire season.
- 500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

- 000 [No introduction.] Williams offered the myriad groups and pressures, such as political pressure, that make busy fire seasons difficult for the people at NIFC to effectively aid the people on the ground. Williams talked about “the reallocation of resources” nationwide during a busy fire season, meaning moving people and equipment from one region to another and about political pressure.
- 045 Williams retired in 1996, because he faced mandatory retirement at 55 years old. He said he was fairly ready in 1996 to move on to life after work. During 1996, except to train foresters in Montana, Williams has not participated in forest fire management. He said he stayed involved by watching events and occasionally writing letter about certain aspects of fire policy.
- 095 During the 1990s, according to Williams, forest policy began to change significantly. He talked about policies changes, particularly how they affected places where he worked previously. He talked in general terms about policy changes that caused him some consternation. He mentioned a national fire plan and how it could help the confusion in fire policy.
- 145 With prompting from the interviewer, Williams offered, in detail, his opinions about the 2000 fire season. He specifically mentioned a proscribed burn that escaped and endangered houses and property near and in Los Alamos, New Mexico and additional aspects of the fire season.
- 190 After a fire a crew would “mop-up” the affected area. Williams talked about exactly what comprised the term, “mop-up.”
- 215 Williams briefly explained aspects of a recreation program, such as one that he oversaw while an assistant fire control officer.
- 240 In terms of communication during a fire, Williams stated, “there is never enough good communication on a fire.” He mentioned the importance of communication, particularly when he worked as an incident commander on project fires. He said he used communication with fire crews to find out aspects of the fire that Williams could provide assistance with.
- 270 According to the interviewer, the forest service seems to be caught between a rock and a hard place in terms of its relationship with its constituency. Williams offered his opinions about the interviewer’s hypothesis and about when the theory actually began to occur. Williams particularly talked about the extremism of the environmental movement.

- 310 Williams offered advice to anyone interested in pursuing a career in the forest service or in forest fire management. He said to work hard and to learn from everybody, including you.
- 330 With prompting from the interviewer, Williams talked about what advice he would give to the policy makers. Williams concluded by placing forest fire fighting into his life picture.
- 380 **END OF SIDE ONE**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Boise, Idaho

Los Alamos, New Mexico

Malheur National Forest (Oregon)

National Interagency Fire Center (Boise, Idaho)

Rogue River National Forest (Oregon/California border)

Shady Beach fire (1988, Oregon)

United States Forest Service

Willamette National Forest (Oregon)